

The Community Health Center of Burlington was awarded \$10.9 million in federal stimulus funds for construction of a new building that will double the center's size and allow it to serve more patients throughout Chittenden County, Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) announced.

"We are making significant progress in improving access to affordable primary health care in Vermont. In the last few years we have gone from two Federally Qualified Health Centers to eight, and now more than 100,000 Vermonters get their primary care at these centers," Sanders said. "The new Burlington center will expand services for more patients from throughout the community at a much-improved facility."

Sanders is leading the effort to significantly expand health centers as part of an overhaul of the nation's health system that is working its way through Congress.

Leahy said. "As we move forward as a nation to create meaningful and comprehensive health care reform, the importance of enhancing our primary care workforce is one of the most important issues we can address. The funding announced today for the Community Health Center of Burlington will provide much-needed support to improve and enhance the Center and serve more Vermonters as a result. Health centers are integral to providing services around the country and especially in rural areas and I look forward to ensuring health centers thrive in Vermont."

Welch said, "The Community Health Center of Burlington truly puts community first. It is the glue that holds health services together in Chittenden County. Improving and expanding this vital resource so that it can serve more Vermonters fulfills the Recovery Act's mission of enhancing services and creating jobs. Going forward, we must continue to invest in the state's growing network of Federally Qualified Health Centers."

The Burlington center offers primary health care, dental care, mental health counseling and low-cost prescription drugs to some 13,000 residents of Chittenden County. The project will expand access at the center's current site in Burlington's Old North End, the most densely populated urban neighborhood in Vermont. The health center also is a significant economic engine in a part of the city that has been seriously impacted by the recession.

"This is quite simply a transformational grant for our organization, community and patients," said Grace Gilbert-David, interim executive director of the Burlington center. "On behalf of the community health center, we are deeply honored to have this incredible chance to turn our dreams into reality for community residents in need of access to affordable health care."

Burlington was among more than 80 centers out of 620 applicants nationwide that won a share of \$525 million in one-time competitive grants. The funding is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the economic stimulus package. The winning health centers had to demonstrate that proposed projects would improve access to health care and create jobs.

Earlier this year, the eight community health centers throughout Vermont received almost \$5 million in economic stimulus funds to address immediate and pressing facility and equipment needs. The Vermont centers also shared \$1.5 million to expand services and create jobs. Separately, Springfield Hospital was awarded \$1.3 million to become Vermont's eighth Federally Qualified Health Center.

The other centers are the Community Health Centers of The Rutland Region in Bomoseen, Little Rivers Health Care of Bradford; Community Health Services of the Lamoille Valley in Morrisville; The Health Center of Plainfield; Northern Tier Community Health in Richford; Northern Counties Health Care in St. Johnsbury, and the Springfield Medical Care Systems in Springfield.

Altogether, the Vermont centers and 40 satellite offices provide primary health care to more than 100,000 patients regardless of their ability to pay.

Nationwide, a total of \$2 billion was set aside for Federally Qualified Health Centers in the economic recovery bill that Congress passed last February 13.